

ICPC CONFUSED, HOUSE OF REP OPTIMISTIC ON OBASANJO'S PROBE ...as CACOL storms the National Assembly

What would have ended up as a re-invention of the typical scenario during public protests in the military era, when processions were dispersed with brute force, was averted on Wednesday 16 April 2008 at the gate of the National Assembly. That was when security agents made unsuccessful efforts to prevent members of the Coalition Against Corrupt Leaders (CACOL) from gaining entry into the seat of Nigeria's Legislative Powers. CACOL members had gone in procession to register their displeasure over the reluctance of the anti-graft agencies and the two houses of the Nigerian Legislature to invite the immediate past president of Nigeria General Olusegun Obasanjo for questioning over his regime's mismanagement of national resources during the period of its reign between May 1999 and May 2007.

Led by its Chairman, Mr. Debo Adeniran, members of CACOL, joined by legions of other civil rights activists from all nooks and crannies of Nigeria including Lagos, Abeokuta, Ibadan, Benin-City, Enugu, Port-Harcourt, Abuja, Kaduna, etc., had converged in Abuja Wednesday morning with banners and placards at exactly 11:14 a.m. stormed the office of Independent Corrupt Practice and other related offences Commission (ICPC) in Abuja. They were in the Nigeria's exotic capital city to protest what they viewed as disinterestedness of the two prominent anti-graft agencies EFCC and ICPC in the petitions the Coalition submitted to each of them late 2007. They had complained that going by the precedence set at the speed with which the agencies prosecuted some governors of the same era, the agencies ought to by now have invited the subject of their petition, Olusegun Obasanjo for questioning, if not prosecution. They urged the members of the Assembly to prevail on both the EFCC and ICPC to speed up work and conclude their investigations with a view to commencing prosecution of the retired General for corrupt practices while in office as Nigerian president.

With peaceful demonstration and solidarity songs, the Coalition registered its disappointment and dissatisfaction over the partial conducts of anti-graft agencies that have bent the law and flip panted it to make the former president and his protégés, viz: Patricia Olubunmi Etteh, Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello and their likes, sacred cows that cannot be tamed. Specifically, the Coalition demanded that President Obasanjo and other corrupt leaders be investigated and jailed for subverting the rule of law, together with looting our National treasury. However, the Coalition warned that it will not hesitate to resort to invoking the swift intervention of some regional bodies as well as International court to secure justice, if the second submitted petition is treated with negligence, like the first one.

Earlier in the day, the CACOL procession had moved from their point to convergence at the junction of Wonderland Amusement park near the National Stadium to the ICPC office. After an initial reluctance to attend to the protesters, one official of the Commission's Public Relations Unit, Mr Demola Bakare listened to the Coalition's mission to the Commission and agreed to usher just four members comprising of the Chairman Debo Adeniran, Acting Secretary, Mr Declan Ihekaire, Mr Soji Apampa of the Coalitions for Change and Pastor Samson Olayiwola of Grassroots Powerpoint to the chairman's office to submit their protest letters as well as copies of the petition earlier submitted to its Lagos office since December 12, 2007.

Comrade Wale Balogun from Lagos who spoke as a member of the Coalition at the ICPC headquarters and Comrade Babatunde Ayelabola from Abuja told the agency that “Nigerians are oblivious of the uncountable cases it has swept under the carpet”. Earlier, the Chairman of CACOL Debo Adeniran had called on “all Nigerians to do whatever in their capacity to join the campaign that is geared towards ensuring that corrupt leaders, who are responsible for the misery of the mass of Nigerian people are made to face the full weight of the law for their actions emphasizing that any negligence on their part will show that they like the way they are being enslaved in their own country by their own government”. He reminded the Commission “any attempt by the ICPC to ignore CACOL’s petition would discredit it further because CACOL is constituted by organizations and individuals that don’t take silence for an answer”.

After collecting the documents, the secretary to Justice Emmanuel Ayoola, the Chairman of ICPC assured the Coalition that he would deliver the documents to the Chairman as soon as he returned from the National Assembly where he was said to have gone to participate in the public hearing on the probe of allocation of landed properties within the Federal Capital Territory.

Later, Mr. Demola Bakare, while addressing the protesters outside the agency’s premises, told them that he appreciated their orderliness, pledging that their protest letter will be duly attended to. In addition, he said, “that the agency would definitely come up with what will convince Nigerians that ICPC’s exercise is strictly based on integrity and transparency”.

On enquiry about the state of the said petition Mr Bakare could not confirm if he had heard anything about it. He was rather evasive in answering the question pushed to him on whether the petition was transmitted to the Headquarters of the Commission or not. His reply was non-committal, “I want to assure you that all official documents received on behalf of the Commission are usually sent here”, the Public Relations official said, on whether he was aware of this particular petition by CACOL, he could “not make any comment until he confirmed the positions” from his superior officers.

The Coalition, therefore, proceeded to the National Assembly to, according to its letter to the house Speaker:

- 1) Appeal to the two houses to prevail on EFCC and ICPC to work on its (Coalition’s) Petitions.
- 2) Demand that the Probe of Obasanjo regime should not end up in the obnoxious pre-bargaining, but in jail, and
- 3) That Senator Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello should be tried for corruption.

While chanting its solidarity songs and stressing that the House should go deep down to excavate all the crimes committed by all past and present corrupt leaders including Obasanjo, the impeached former Speaker of House of Representatives, Mrs Patricia Etteh and daughter of former president Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello, who subjected Nigerians to lives of penury. The procession then moved to the National Assembly in a convoy of buses and cars. On approaching the gate, the police officers would not ascertain the mission of the convoy before they were asked to make a u-turn to the outward bond lane. All efforts to persuade the security officers that the passengers were on solidarity visit to the house were met with rebuff.

At the hilt of their frustration, the Coalition members were directed to disembark from the vehicles while the vehicles were neatly parked on the kerbs. At this point, CACOL Chairman made to persuade the most senior officer at the gate but his effort failed as the senior cop ignored the activist but instead make to barricade the entry route with the gate bar. However Adeniran pushed his weight at the open end of the bar and the lock end thereby paving way for other members of the Coalition to gain entrance.

On discovering that they could not stop the protesters from the Assembly drive way by foot they resorted into frantic efforts through their walkie-talkie to call for reinforcement. Their efforts did not yield significant fruits until the protesters were met by a detachment of about ten police officers led by Mr. Kenechukwu Onwuemeli, a Chief Superintendent of Police who later introduced himself to the CACOL leaders as the DPO in charge of the National Assembly security post.

It is significant to note that CSP Onwuemeli's approach was totally gentlemanly even when some of his lieutenants were overzealous and rude. The DPO calmed the angered activist and sought audience with the leadership of the Coalition with whom he struck a bargain after some heated arguments that only five of the protesters would be allowed to entry into the National Assembly. The CACOL Chairman however, persuaded the cop leader to allow eight others who represented different zonal arrangements of the Coalition to join him to present the documents to the Assembly. This led to the selection of Mr. Soji Apampa, Hajia Halima Wali-Inuwa both from the Coalitions for change, Alh. Toyin Raheem, Pastor Samson Olayiwola, Mr. Declan Ihekaire, Mr. Patrick Okeke, Mr. Leke Adebajo, Mr. Debo Adeniran himself and one other who were driven in a police pick-up jeep into the National Assembly Complex.

The first point of call was the DPO, office all the security post of the complex. The delegation was offered bottled water while the DPO went to inform the speaker of the House of Representative of the presence of the CACOL leaders and intimate him with their mission. He came back about forty minutes later to expressed the speakers apology that he could not attend to us personally but asked the Chairman, House Committee on Anti-corruption, National Ethics and Values, Hon. Sabo Mohammed Nakudu, representing Birnin-Kudu/Buji Federal Constituency to attend to the activists.

When they were ushered into Hon. Nakudu's office the Anti-Corruption leader in the House of Reps restated the Hon. Speaker apology stating further that the Speaker, Hon. Dimeji Bankole appreciated their coming but for the fact that the day was a sitting day for the House and he would not want to keep members waiting he would have loved to personally attend to the CACOL leaders.

The CACOL Chairman, Mr. Debo Adeniran addressed their host and presented him with copies of his Coalition petitions to the EFCC and ICPC with the covering letter stating their complaints requests and demands. In his speech, Debo Adeniran expressed CACOL's appreciation of the House's effort to correct the ills of the past by "the current examination of what went wrong in the past with a view to cantoning future leaders on the need to guard their loins and making deterrent examples of the present culprits so as not to perpetuate a culture of squandering and corruption in the political leadership of the country". The CACOL leader therefore pleaded with the two chambers of the Assembly to "ensure that leave no stone unturned in their investigations and probes but also to make records of their

proceedings as well as the reports of the probe activities available for the use of the generality of Nigerians”. Mr. Adeniran said that his Coalition recognized “the limitation of the legislatures as lacking in prosecutorial powers but they have the powers to invite anyone in Nigeria no matter how powerful and influential to answer questions bordering on the performance or otherwise of his functions or the appropriateness or otherwise of his conduct in any sphere of our national life”.

He pleaded further, “once thorough investigations of corrupt practices were carried out and adequate evidences were taken in the full glare of Nigerians the legislatures would have been deemed to have done its own bit, what would be required would be the output of such exercises in terms of the reports which anti-corruption and other law-enforcement agencies could be used to prosecute any indicted serving retired, or sacked state officials”. If the agencies with prosecutorial powers fail in their duties to prosecute indicted officials, Mr. Adeniran asserted “outfits like ours would now have to come in to performing its duties of pressuring such lethargic or derelict agencies to do what they were set up with taxpayers’ money to do”.

At this juncture Alhaji Toyin Raheem, a member of the delegation from Lagos State made his contribution quoting copiously from the Constitution to justify his assertions that the legislature owe Nigerians the duty to remove any acts that are not meant for the common good and to ensure that no corrupt officer goes unpunished.

Lastly, Mr. Soji Apampa, of the Coalitions for change pointed out to Hon. Nakudu that most corruption were perpetrated during the second term of office of former president Obasanjo saying “before 2005 when the National Integrated Power Project was launched and the \$16bn scandal about \$4bn only was spent on the power sector”. Mr. Apampa said the “wasted and stolen money could have done so much for the poor in the areas of health, education, water and sanitation”.

Responding, Hon. Sabo Nakudu who received the petitions and the letter on behalf of the Hon Speaker of the House with appreciation over the activists “courage and doggedness”, promising “to submit it to the house and ensure that it receives careful attention”. He promised further to adequately brief the speaker of the House on the mission of CACOL to the National Assembly. He promised to ensure that all agencies complained about would be written and meetings would be held with them with a view to ensuring that the complaints in the petitions were looked into. He said thereafter the Coalition would be invited to a meeting where next lines of actions would be discussed. He however assured that the House would “not hesitate to invite and question the ex-president Obasanjo when the time comes for such”, stressing that “the law is bigger than any citizen”. Finally he assured the delegation that they would not have to wait for too long before their complaints are looked into.

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CACOL. 18 April, 2008

- *Being the report of events of the protest march held to ICPC headquarters and National Assembly in Abuja on Wednesday, April 16, 2008 by the Coalition Against Corrupt Leaders (CACOL) for the Media*